

**Introduced by Senator Battin**

March 29, 2005

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Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 35—Relative to Polio Awareness Day.

## LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SCR 35, as introduced, Battin. Polio Awareness Day.

This measure would declare April 12, 2005, to be Polio Awareness Day, a day to commemorate the development of the polio vaccine and to acknowledge polio survivors.

Fiscal committee: no.

1 WHEREAS, Anyone over the age of 50 years is likely to  
2 remember the terror of polio. Beaches were closed at the height  
3 of summer because the crippling, contagious disease seemed to  
4 spread through contact with water. Adults and children saw their  
5 lives become a nightmare of isolation wards, spinal taps, braces,  
6 orthopedic surgeries, social stigma, and confinement inside an  
7 iron lung — sometimes for years — just to breathe; and  
8 WHEREAS, At the time, polio was seen as a disease of  
9 immigrants in primitive, filthy living conditions. Public health  
10 officials enacted strict sanitation policies. But as the 20th century  
11 progressed, polio (once called “infantile paralysis”) began  
12 striking older children and adults, and disproportionately hit the  
13 middle class. Scientists now believe that improved sanitation was  
14 to blame. When water supplies were consistently contaminated  
15 with the poliovirus, as they were in impoverished areas, people  
16 were typically infected during infancy, but most suffered little  
17 more than diarrhea, and then had lifelong immunity against polio.  
18 In contrast, middle-class people with access to clean drinking  
19 water might not encounter the virus until later in childhood, when

1 the virus was more likely to spread to the brain and spinal cord  
2 and cause paralysis; and

3 WHEREAS, The so-called iron lung was the first effective  
4 treatment for patients so severely paralyzed they couldn't  
5 breathe. First used in 1928 on an 8-year-old girl with polio at  
6 Children's Hospital Boston, it consisted of a tank made by a local  
7 tinsmith and a pair of vacuum cleaner blowers. As the machine  
8 breathed for her, the girl revived and later asked for ice cream.  
9 Later, as demand grew, hospitals moved to room-sized  
10 respirators. Former patients can describe living in respirators for  
11 months on end, never leaving to be bathed or changed, eating flat  
12 on their backs, relying on nurses to feed them and mirrors to see  
13 around them. During power outages, hospital staff, including  
14 doctors, took turns pumping the respirators with a bellows; and

15 WHEREAS, A vaccine was desperately needed, but before Dr.  
16 Jonas Salk could create one there needed to be a practical way to  
17 grow poliovirus in quantity in the lab. In the late 1940s, the virus  
18 could only be grown in nerve tissue, which is difficult to  
19 maintain, or in live monkeys, a laborious and costly approach.  
20 Although Dr. Salk is famous for developing the polio vaccine,  
21 John Enders, Thomas Weller, and Frederick Robbins of  
22 Children's Hospital Boston were the first to culture poliovirus in  
23 a variety of tissues — under primitive lab conditions — earning  
24 them a Nobel Prize in 1954; and

25 WHEREAS, This critical step, which enabled Salk to develop  
26 a vaccine, was accomplished on a shoestring budget in a  
27 makeshift lab. John Enders and colleagues initially had no  
28 protective apparatus, had no sterile hoods for working with  
29 viruses, and had to book glassware for experiments in advance  
30 since there was not enough to go around. They made do by being  
31 creative: Thomas Weller purchased a \$15,000 autoclave at  
32 auction for \$25, and two craftsmen in the building built them  
33 some primitive equipment; and

34 WHEREAS, On April 12, 1955, the Salk polio vaccine was  
35 announced. Within a few years, polio virtually disappeared. Polio  
36 was declared eradicated in the United States in 1979. Yet  
37 according to the World Health Organization, polio cases  
38 worldwide rose by one-third in 2004, due in part to a vaccine  
39 boycott; now, therefore, be it

1     *Resolved by the Senate of the State of California, the Assembly*  
2     *thereof concurring,* That the Legislature declares April 12, 2005,  
3     to be Polio Awareness Day, a day to commemorate the  
4     development of the polio vaccine and to acknowledge polio  
5     survivors; and be it further

6     *Resolved,* That the Secretary of the Senate transmit copies of  
7     this resolution to the author for appropriate distribution.

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